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ABSTRACT

In preparing a special needs student for employment, a variety of assessments should be used based upon the skill level of the individual student. Past challenges and successes in vocational education must be examined. These past challenges and successes are the building blocks and roadmaps necessary for individual success. During the planning process, all available data must be collected and reviewed to create a baseline assessment. This baseline then becomes the springboard for an action plan. The action plan includes data from before, during, and after the training process. This plan includes assessment and implementation as an evolving sequence of events that continues until the desired goal is achieved. Seven training steps include the following: (1) baseline data; (2) creation of an action plan including training and behavior and additional information; (3) writing a task analysis; (4) implementation; (5) 30-day assessment, including changes in training and changes in behavior and additional information; (6) implementation of the changed plan; and (7) repetition of steps five and six until successful results are achieved. (This paper contains a case study of a training program for a mentally challenged girl.) (KC)

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MINI-TIP
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AMERICAN VOCATIONAL ASSOCIATION CONVENTION
Denver, CO December 2, 1995

Top of the Mountain
Exceptional Outcomes for the Low to Moderate Mentally Challenged Individuals

The Top of the Mountain presentation is a focus on the training methods used with the low to moderate mentally challenged. In preparing the special needs student for employment, a variety of assessments should be used based upon the skill level of that individual student. Past challenges and successes in vocational education must be examined. These past challenges and successes are the building blocks and roadmaps necessary for individual success. During the planning process, all available data must be collected and reviewed to create a baseline assessment. This baseline then becomes the springboard for the action plan. The action plan looks at data from before, during, and after the training process. This plan looks at assessment and implementation as an evolving sequence of events that continues until the desired goal is achieved.

Training Steps:

1. Baseline data
2. Creation of action plan
    a. training
    b. behavior additional information
3. Write task analysis
4. Implementation
5. 30 day assessment
    a. changes in training
    b. changes in behavior additional information
6. Implementation
7. Repeat steps 5 and 6 until successful results are achieved

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TOP OF THE MOUNTAIN

ACHEIVING PEAK PERFORMANCES

PRESENTED BY
RON PYLE
AVA-SPECIAL NEEDS DIVISION
DECEMBER 3, 1995
DENVER, COLORADO

Sue

My introduction to Sue came with a new job as the C.O.R.E. teacher in a rural high school in the state of Texas. The CORE class curriculum was designed to teach life skills, vocational skills, and very basic academics to students with IQ's below 70. The majority of the vocational skills training was addressed through a community based vocational training program at the Marriott Hotel. After performing my initial assessments of the students at the beginning of the year, it was obvious that Sue was the student who was going to need the most help, as well as give me one my biggest challenges as a teacher.

My initial assessment of Sue was that she was 19 years old, non-verbal, possibly somewhat limited in dexterity, low IQ, and she had some documented as well as observed behavior problems. Her parent were supportive but quite cautious, even to the point of excitable, from past experiences and problems arising from their daughter's behavior at school. In discussing past performances with different school personnel about Sue, there were some differences of opinion regarding her ability. These differences of opinions concerning her ability level were not substantiated by the testing done by the district. It is my belief that in education we should always strive to reach peak performances with all students. In stating this, I believe that there is a place also for realistic expectations. High expectations can sometimes overshadow a student's capabilities and interfere with that particular student's educational process.

In looking at all the information that I had gathered from the testing, observations, parents, past and present teachers, and records from the community based vocational training program, it was decided that a needs analysis should be written. Graphs available from past data would be constructed and new ones would be made as information unfolded. This information would eventually be used to construct a plan to help Sue become successful both at school and in the community based vocational training program at the Marriott.

!nitial Analysis

1) Behavior. Sue's list of behavior problems were many, from the time she got to school until the time she went home. On a regular basis she refused to get off the bus. Upon getting into school she would routinely stand in the hall and refuse to go to class. At times, she would refuse to cooperate in the classroom , thus ending up with time outs. She refused to do more than ten minutes worth of work at the community based vocational training program.

2) Social Interaction. Sue's social interaction skills needed improvment. She needed to work on the areas of appropriate lunch room skills, taking turns, and appropriate times for social contact. (You never knew when you were going to receive the BIG bear hug, not just me, the principal and anyone else within reach!) A large amount of the time she seemed happy, but at times also seemed upset and confused.

3) Systematic Training. With my background as an Employment Specialist, I knew that systematic training with Sue was going to become extremely important. As I began to structure her day on a track, I noticed that I was not getting the results that I had anticipated. In spite of the decreased results, the track continued and the data was graphed on a daily basis.

4) Team Support Across the board support for Sue's education plan was a must. The school was very supportive with Sue. In cases involving some students, parental support is extremely important, if not critical. Upon talking with Sue's parents, I felt that they wanted to be supportive, but were cautiously optimistic with their daughter's teacher. I assured them that this was going to be the best year they had ever had with their daughter in school. I told them that I planned to contact them on a regular basis for updates from school and to get information from them. I knew that if I could win the support of Sue's parents they would be an invaluable resource. Her parents had lived with her for 19 years and they knew quite well what their daughter was doing at school. What they wanted was what every parent wants, a successful student with good notes and phone calls from school. In light of the parent's past experiences and cautious attitude, I decided that nothing but positive notes and phone calls would be used with her parents.

Evaluation and Discovery

When I implemented Sue's initial systematic training or "track," I began evaluating her progress on a weekly basis using graphs. After studying a month's worth of data and graphs, I began to see some positive movement in Sue's learning curve. I decided to pick the task that she enjoyed the most, and increase the amount of data collected. While discussing Sue with her mother, I told her that Sue was about 85% accurate in making coffee at school. Mother stated she did not come anywhere close to this at home and was also having a hard time getting Sue to help keep her room clean. She wanted to know if I could work with her at school on cleaning, and I agreed to help Sue with cleaning activities.

To help Sue at school with cleaning at home, she watched a video daily that demonstrated cleaning a room. Several interesting things began to emerge. A few comments were made about how Sue was always watching videos in class. But in a true setting using a task analysis, the tapes proved to be an invaluable teaching tool. The information was presented in exactly the same way on a daily basis over an extended period of time. As this was going on, the data I was collecting was growing and the evaluation process was getting closer to the formulation of her new training plan. After Sue had watched this video for about a month, I received a very exciting phone call from Sue's mother. She wanted to thank me for helping Sue learn how to help clean her room. She told me that about a week ago, she had noticed Sue had shown an interest in cleaning her room and was now attempting to clean her room each day after school. Although a lot of the clothes were being put in the wrong drawers I was still talking with one very happy parent. After the phone call, I went back into my lesson plans and discovered that if Sue saw information presented the exact same way about 20 times, not only could she learn it, but there was carry-over into her home environment.

*1) **Behavior.*** Although behavior modification techniques were being used, up to this point their focus needed to change. A lot of Sue's behavior, I felt, was due to her lack of understanding of social expectations. We decided to incorporate positive reinforcement for small steps that would gradually be chained together to create large steps over a long period of time. At the suggestion of her mother a Coke would be used as the positive reinforcer. We chose to address behavior as a matter of choices. She was given 10 seconds to process these choices on a very consistent basis.

*2) **Social Interaction.*** Social interaction *is* behavior but in Sue's case needed to be addressed as a separate situation. Again choices were used with the 10 second processing period. Teaching continued via the use of video tapes. One of the main behaviors addressed was the "big bear hug." It is not inappropriate to hug, but it is inappropriate to do so without asking. We instructed her that in order to hug someone, from now on she would have to ask with a hand gesture. (This proved to be successful! She would ask-they would say yes-*then* receive her BIG bear hug; including the principal). I was one of the few that refused the bear hugs on a consistent basis. I would instead shake her hand. Although not completely happy with this, she accepted it. The same results with this behavior were showing up at home.

*3) **Learning New Tasks.*** A modified task analysis was used with classroom activities as well as in the community based vocational instruction program. Emphasis was placed on proficiency of only one to two steps at a time. Teaching and learning the new tasks would be followed up with positive reinforcement. As a history of proficiency emerged with a step, another would be added. Every time a step was added, we continued to use positive reinforcement. This process continued until the complete task was learned.

4) Teamwork. There was consistent support for Sue's training program at school and at the job training site. Although the parents were very supportive at this point, we were still doing things differently at home than at school. After discussing this with her parents, a training date was set for their home. The parents were taught about the Task Analysis, Chaining, and the importance of being consistent at home and at school. Mom now knew why Sue could make coffee at school and not at home. Mom's method of making coffee involved different steps than the method used at school and the differences were confusing to Sue. (The old saying, "There's more than one way to skin a cat." does not apply to student's with special learning needs!) After consistency of training was established at home, Sue's success with coffee making at home and school improved dramatically.

Conclusion

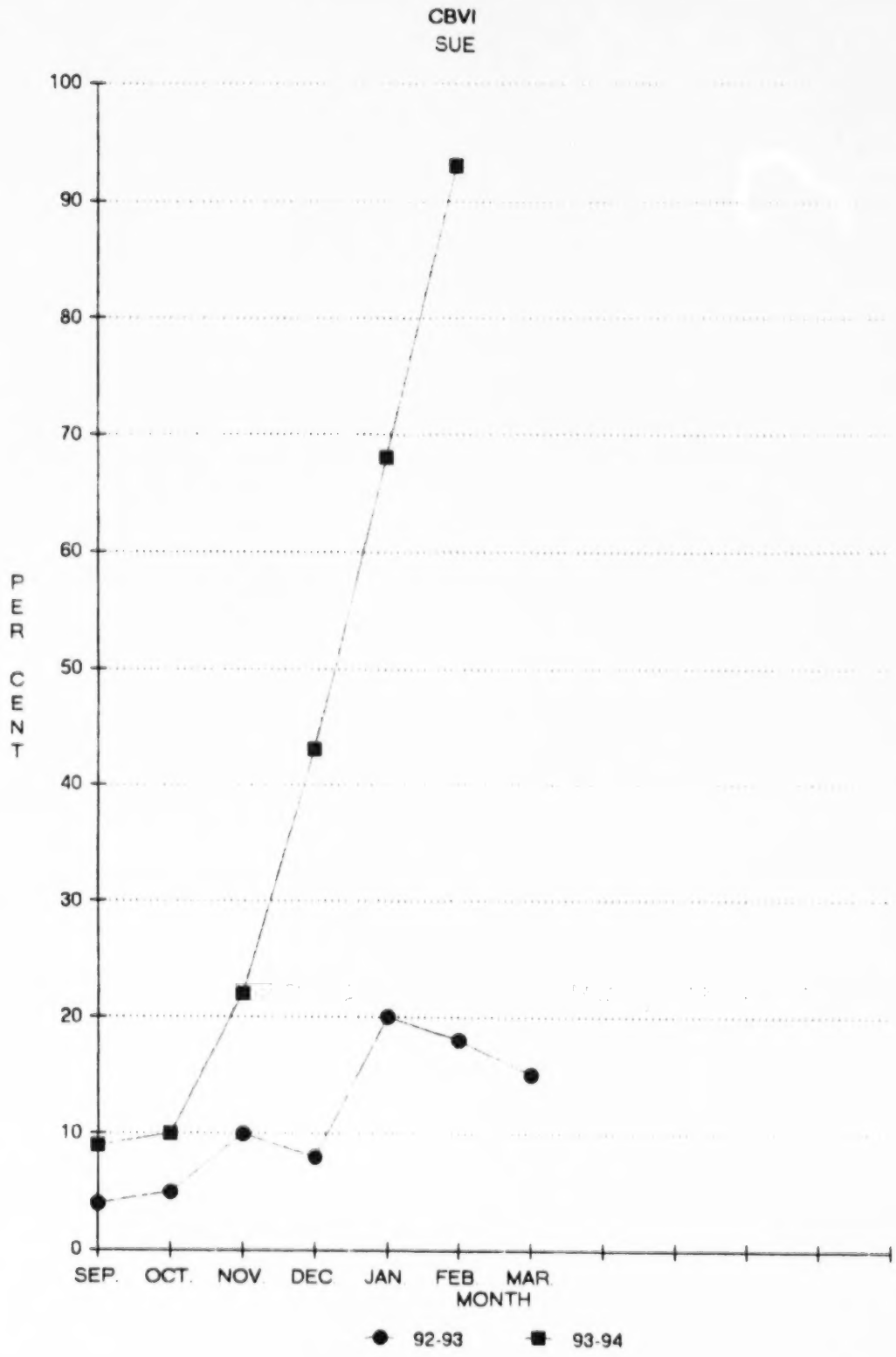
Examination of the improvement shown on the graph from the community based vocational training site on the following page shows team participation working over a period of time. This graph shows a remarkable increase in performance at the job training site. What this graph doesn' show is a very happy student who very seldom got into trouble for her behavior. It doesn't show a student that had gained acceptable social skills and was being supported by a team from school and from home. The graph also doesn't show a happy set of parents who happen to be very big supporters of education.

In assessing the needs of our special student population an amazing amount of factors need to be included. The initial assessment for vocational training may take a long time, but if done correctly, it will help produce very positive outcomes. Parents are also one of the biggest sources of information about the special needs student. Great care must be taken to foster and support a positive relationship with parents. Without the development of teamwork between the parents and educators, the ending to this story would not have been so successful.

Follow-Up

Just as Sue had started working 100% of the time, her family needed to move to a nearby school district. Her mother asked me if I could contact her new teacher and possibly visit with them at their new school district. Our principal thought this was a good idea and permission was granted. In discussing transition from school to work, another issue was also addressed, transition from school to school. Every effort was made to make sure that this transition was a positive one.

After the move, I heard from the mother occasionally. She kept using me as a resource to fine tune her own training abilities at home. The last time I heard from her she told me that they were moving to another state. Sue had graduated and her mother wanted to thank me again for being the only person to go to her home to teach her how to work with her daughter. To this day, I cannot figure out who really learned the most from this situation; Sue, Mom, or me.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